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GUEST: **Fred Eckhard**
Spokesman for the Secretary-General of the United Nations

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

1997 YEAR IN REVIEW

Fred ECKHARD, Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General discusses the major events of 1997 from a United Nations perspective.

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Executive Producer: Kamil Taha
Director: Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant: Sheila Poinesette

ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview program about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

In 1997, Kofi Annan of Ghana, assumed office as the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations. Meanwhile, the financial crisis and the debate over the reform of the World Organization continued through out the year.

1997 was also a year of confrontations. From Iraq and the issue of chemical warfare, to humanitarian emergencies in Central Africa and North Korea.

With me today to discuss these and other United Nations activities during the past year, is Fred Eckhard, Spokesman for the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

But before I talk with Mr. Eckhard, let's look at a 15-minute video of major events from 1997 as seen from a United Nations perspective.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is a special edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest today is Fred Eckhard, the Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General. Mr. Eckhard, welcome to **World Chronicle.**

ECKHARD: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Fred, let's talk a bit about the financial crisis and the Secretary-General's reform program. How serious really is the financial crisis? Is the UN merely confronted with the real prospect to bankruptcy, insolvency in 1998?

ECKHARD: We've been virtually bankrupt for a number of years and that we have not had enough money to run the program that the General Assembly gave us to carry out. The way we've compensated for the shortfall is by borrowing from peacekeeping operations. The reason why there is money in the peacekeeping account is that the largest cost of peacekeeping is the troops. We borrow the troops from governments, we pay governments for those troops. By withholding the payments to governments, we've created a bit of a cash reserve that we can borrow to run the normal program of the UN. The problem with that scenario is that the size of our peacekeeping operations has been shrinking and it will shrink further in 1998.

LITTLEJOHNS: So there's a smaller amount of money to borrow from.

ECKHARD: Smaller amount of money to borrow from and we've been borrowing progressively more in recent years. So there's the potential for reaching a crunch point in '98.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now if that cash cow ceases to exist, how's the UN going to go?

ECKHARD: We would have to stop implementing programs, we'd have to lay off people, we'd have to shut down certain activities.

LITTLEJOHNS: Payless paydays, is that what they say?

ECKHARD: It's possible, yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Why is – why is it the United States is still holding out, because there was an agreement last year between the congress and the Clinton administration that the United States would pay, if not all of the dues which are – arrears which are reckoned to be something over a billion that something over 8 – 800 million to what they plan to pay. Why is it that that check has not arrived?

ECKHARD: That deal was reached earlier in 1997 and it was essentially to pay a percentage something a little bit more than half of the arrears to stay current with the current obligations, ah, and there were a number of conditions attached to that. The Secretary-General was not thrilled with that because the principle is ..

LITTLEJOHNS: They were not thrilled with the conditions.

ECKHARD: Not thrilled with the conditions. Not thrilled with the partial payment of arrears, but he welcomed it as a first step towards bringing the US back into the fold. And of course, that was negotiated with some of the most conservative members of the US congress and it seemed politically very firm. What happened was a purely domestic – a matter of domestic US politics, where a member of congress attached a rider to this legislation concerning the very inflammatory issue domestically of abortion. And that was a killer amendment and the legislation was never approved.

LITTLEJOHNS: The .. this member of congress who I believe was Christopher Smith of New Jersey seemed to think that the United Nations sort of promoting abortion. What could the Secretary-General do to satisfy conservatives and the pro-life people in the congress that the UN is not doing the things that they seem to suspect it's doing?

ECKHARD: We suspect that there was not really much substance to this initiative because, in fact, US funding for international population programs went through on a different piece of legislation. And what we were confused about is why this member of congress singled out the UN legislation which contain no money for population programs. So, I think it was make a political point and he succeeded in doing that, but he did not stopped funding for a population programs. I think we have a formula that is agreed on for the carrying out of population activities abroad. That is acceptable, by and large, to the American public. But that seems not to have been the issue in this case.

LITTLEJOHNS: So, it's really a, in a way, a phoney issue.

ECKHARD: I think the way it was applied, yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now, let's talk about reforms. The Secretary-General had a fairly sweeping reform package released in the middle of July it's taking a long time for the reforms

that require approval by the General Assembly to be approved. What is the situation now as we do this program.

ECKHARD: It was really a very successful year. The initial package that the General Assembly considered were those items that the Secretary-General said were within his authority to implement. He was merely asking for the blessing of the General Assembly. But there were judgment calls in that package. He does feel that over the years, the power of the Secretary-General has eroded and he's looking to restore balance. So there were some quibbles there as to what was within his authority, what was not. The debate on that package lasted something like five weeks. Much longer than we expected. But in the end, it was approved. They then went on to the second package which was recommendations where he felt he did not have the full authority he needed their approval, budgetary or otherwise, and they are now on the verge of approving that and so it looks like a very successful year as far as UN reform goes with the assembly giving him, by consensus, an overwhelming endorsement of his proposals.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now, over all, Fred, would you say that the Secretary-General is reasonably satisfied with his first year in office – the things that have been achieved, the way the UN has coped with the manifold problems that confronted it?

ECKHARD: I think he's satisfied certainly with the internal restructuring that he has been able to do, and the approval the Assembly has given him for that new structure, which is much more streamlined. I think that management school say that a Chief Executive Office can handle about six portfolios directly. He had twenty eight or so people reporting to him directly. He has now streamlined that – with the Deputy, with various discussion groups or policy groups for the main areas of the United Nations work. He's narrowed the agenda or is the focus of the agenda and he streamlined the administrative means for carrying it out. That's a big plus.

LITTLEJOHNS: You know the Secretary-General as well as, or better than, most people. What would you say are his goals for 1998?

ECKHARD: I think he would like to put reform behind him as an all-consuming priority item. And move on to the next step which is first taking some of the savings that he realized through administrative streamlining that he has done and putting them into development. And placing economic development back at the center of the UN's agenda. In the peace and security area, he remains interested in furthering this rapid deployment capability for UN peacekeeping troops. Each month or two, there's another nation that signs on formally to provide us with troops or equipment or something else within a relatively quick time frame. So our capacity to respond is improving. But there is this financial uncertainty that hang over him in the first year and which is looming even larger now in the

second year. And there it's his relationship and the UN's relationship with the United States that has to be resolved.

LITTLEJOHNS: And how do you think that is going to be resolved, I mean the -- you mentioned the reform package that was one of the things on which the congress insisted, not only the congress, but the administration. What else can he do to get the confidence of the United States back?

ECKHARD: Well, on the theory that the legislative initiative to pay some of these arrears failed over a narrow domestic issue and not because the congress was opposed to paying UN dues, there is hope that the administration can revive this package early in the new year and the President called the Secretary-General to tell him he was going to take that initiative in February and we understand that the leaders on the congressional side are also interested in seeing if they can revive this legislation that died last year.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you think they're going to abandon the abortion issue and the ...

ECKHARD: That is the obstacle that US legislators will have to overcome.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is there anything the Secretary-General can do on that issue. Can he say, I presume he cannot say, that the UN will not abortions in refugee camps, for example, which is one of those things that Representative Smith mentioned.

ECKHARD: Well, he met with Representative Smith, but there was not meeting of minds. Representative Smith was determined to do things this way, the Secretary-General said why pick on my legislation – it's not relevant to your issue. But he insisted that it was and he went ahead and did that. So I don't know that he can change Congressman Smith's mind. I think it's up to the other members of the US congress to try to do that.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Eckhard, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this special, interesting edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Fred Eckhard, Spokesman for the Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan. I'm Michael Littlejohns, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**